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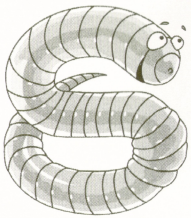
A Guide to Home Composting

Home composting is a simple way to help the environment saving money, energy and CO_2 emissions in the process. Anyone can turn their garden waste and much of their kitchen waste into a rich, brown and useful compost which will keep the garden blooming year after year. Best of all, the compost is completely free and it saves waste too.

To help you get the best results from your efforts, read through this leaflet of composting tips and information before you start.

Getting Started



- For best results place your composter in a sunny spot onto well drained soil. It can be placed on concrete or other solid surfaces but place a layer of soil underneath it.
- Loosen soil beneath the compost bin in order to help drainage and to make it easier for worms and bacteria to enter the bin from the earth surrounding it.
- If you place a few inches of manure or kitchen waste onto the loose earth, this will help to attract worms and micro-organisms.
- It is essential to have a good mix of waste material in your composter to aid decomposition.
- Add different types of material in layers approximately 7-15 cm deep (3-6")
- Get yourself a kitchen bin to collect scraps. You won't need to go down the bottom of the garden to the composter every time you prepare a meal.
- We recommend the use of the optional Base Plate where available. This will aid drainage and ventilation and is particularly useful if the compost bin is not standing on a soil surface.

What can you compost?

- **Vegetable and fruit peelings**
  Mixed together these are excellent - high in essential nitrogen and carbon.
- **Tea leaves, coffee grounds and crushed egg shells**
- **Weeds**
  The heat generated inside the bin by the decomposition process will ensure most weed seeds and diseases are destroyed. However pernicious weeds such as couch grass, bindweed or creeping buttercup should be avoided as they love compost bins and will keep on growing.
- **Grass cuttings**
  High in nitrogen and a good activator. Avoid thick layers as they can compact and turn to slime. If you have a lot of grass, mix it with more woody material and kitchen scraps.
- **Hair**
  Off your pet or family - no problem.
- **Paper**
  Paper (and soft cardboard such as egg trays) can be added in small amounts but ideally should be shredded or scrunched up.
- **Evergreen clippings**
  Take a long time to decompose and should be added only in small amounts.
- **Leaves**
  Contain lignin and take a long time to decompose, the same as wood. Best dealt with separately in leaf mould piles.
- **Prunings**
  Add only in small amounts and chop up well.
- **Straw and hay**
  Old and chopped is best. Soak well before adding if dry.
- **Animal manure**
  Vegetarian pets only, such as guinea pig or rabbit. Best mixed with straw. All are good activators.
- **Vacuum dust**
  The contents of a vacuum cleaner sack compost well particularly if you have woollen carpets. Do not try and compost if you have primarily synthetic carpets - as this will not breakdown.

Things to avoid

- Disposable nappies or used paper hankies (in case the pathogens which carry disease aren't all destroyed by the composting process).
- Excrement - human/cat/dog (for the same reason).
- Hard objects, stones, bits of glass, metal, plastic.
- Cleaning fluids and other household /garden chemicals.
- Meat (cooked or raw) - the smell can attract animals.
- Fish and dairy products are not recommended.

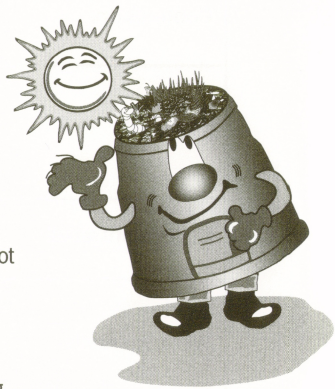
Getting the Best Results

- The micro-organisms in your composter will work at their best when the material is kept warm, moist and oxygenated.

Activators

- Natural activators include: grass; nettles; pond weed; seaweed; comfrey; urine; horse, cow, sheep, pig and pigeon manure and rabbit or guinea pig droppings.
- Activators or accelerators, although not absolutely necessary, heat up and speed up the composting process. Particularly useful during the colder winter months.
- You can buy a range of compost accelerators from your local garden centre, or directly from us at www.evengreener.com. We offer a liquid accelerator which is diluted in a watering can and then poured into the composter.

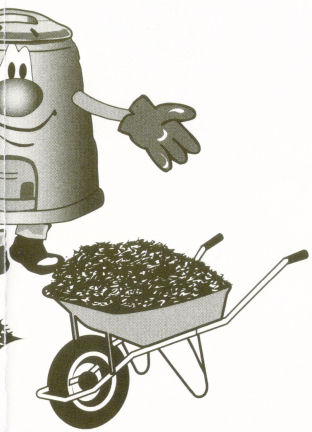
Warmth and moisture



- Always keep the lid on your compost bin; it retains heat and moisture when the weather is dry and protects it when it rains.
- Because you need a fairly high temperature inside your composter, site it out of the wind.
- Site your composter in sunlight if possible. The plastic will absorb the sun's UV rays and heat up the compost.
- Do not let the compost dry out. Add water when necessary in very dry hot weather. Remember to replace the lid.

Aeration

- Our composters are designed so that sufficient air gets to the composting micro-organisms.
- However, occasional turning of the material will ensure that more air gets to the centre of the bin and will speed up decomposition.
- To help aerate your bin you can add scrunched up newspaper which creates air pockets or alternatively purchase an aeration tool.
- Avoid using too much grass.

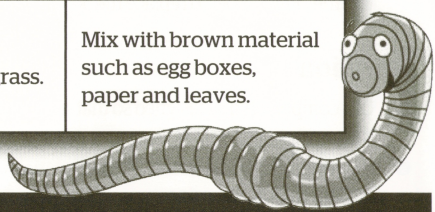


Options for using your compost

- The compost is ready when it is brown and crumbly.
- Dig it into the soil in early spring or late autumn to improve the soil structure and act as a slow release fertiliser.
- Compost will open up clay soil, making it lighter to work and allow better drainage and aeration.
- Compost will stick sandy soil together, slowing over-drainage and holding on to essential moisture.
- Use as a mulch. A 3" depth of compost spread around the garden helps retain moisture and prevent weeds from growing. In addition, it releases nutrients into the soil and improves texture.
- Worms pull down the mulch into their burrows, passing it through their gut, breaking it down even more and mixing it into the soil at the same time .

Trouble-shooting

PROBLEM	REASON	SOLUTION
Compost is not getting hot enough to break down material.	Compost mix not right.	Add more soft sappy nitrogen-rich activating materials (e.g. grass) or a compost activator.
Composter slows down in winter.	Heat loving bacteria slow down.	Adding an activator to the compost will warm the bacteria into action.
Contents dry.	Evaporation of water due to hot weather.	Water your compost until it is moist. Keep lid on composter.
Flies.	Larvae feed on the vegetation. They are harmless but you don't want too many.	Avoid using pesticides. Cover the pile with paper and bury any kitchen scraps.
Unpleasant smell.	Not enough air is getting to compost.	Aerate the compost using a fork or aeration tool.
Wet and smelly.	Too much green material such as grass.	Mix with brown material such as egg boxes, paper and leaves.



Composting and our environment

Composting is not just about gardening - it helps the environment too. Keeping waste out of the dustbin saves all of the cost and energy associated with the collection of the material. It also keeps it out of landfill - and with rising landfill taxes this is is also expensive. As well as the CO_2 savings associated with this, the material in the compost bin will break down aerobically and is unlikely to give off methane (a potent greenhouse gas) as it will in a landfill site. Digging the compost back into the garden completes the carbon cycle and can help to offset your emissions. So, let's put this valuable resource to use, help your garden and the environment and get composting!

For further information on home composting and for accessories and other environmentally friendly products please visit:

www.evengreener.com or call 0845 130 60 90

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